

AFGHANISTAN...ANOTHER CHANCE FOR PEACE WITH HONOR

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 24-03-2011		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Afghanistan...Another Chance For Peace With Honor				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Michael D. Simley				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Professor James O. Kievit Center for Strategic Leadership				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT President Barack Obama has rejected former President George W. Bush's doctrine that placed the "War on Terror" at the center of American foreign policy, yet the Obama Administration has largely adopted the Bush Administration's strategy in Afghanistan. After nine years of war in Afghanistan and with a national deficit exceeding 14.1 trillion dollars and climbing, President Obama's policy in Afghanistan and the economy will likely define the success or failure of his Administration. This paper reviews Al Qaeda's rise to power as a terrorist organization and their attacks against the United States since 1992. It then compares the wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam and recommends adjustments to the Obama Administration's current policy in Afghanistan to achieve a "peace with honor" and permit the nation to focus resources on disrupting Al Qaeda safe havens worldwide.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Insurgency, Counter-insurgency, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Al Qaeda					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 32	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Michael D. Simley
TITLE: Afghanistan...Another Chance for Peace with Honor
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 24 March 2011 WORD COUNT: 6,290 PAGES: 32
KEY TERMS: Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Al Qaeda
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

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This paper reviews Al Qaeda's rise to power as a terrorist organization and their attacks against the United States since 1992. It then compares the wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam and recommends adjustments to the Obama Administration's current policy in Afghanistan to achieve a "peace with honor" and permit the nation to focus resources on disrupting Al Qaeda safe havens worldwide.

AFGHANISTAN...ANOTHER CHANCE FOR PEACE WITH HONOR

President Barack Obama has rejected former President George W. Bush's doctrine that placed the "War on Terror" at the center of American foreign policy,² yet the Obama Administration has largely adopted the Bush Administration's strategy in Afghanistan. After nine years of war in Afghanistan and with a national deficit exceeding 14.1 trillion dollars and climbing, President Obama's policy in Afghanistan and the economy will likely define the success or failure of his Administration.

The Greek historian, Thucydides stated men go to war out of "honor, fear, and interest." The United States went to war in Vietnam for "fear" that communism would spread like a row of dominos. The United States is fighting the war in Afghanistan clearly out of "honor". What's missing in Afghanistan today is a vital "interest" or direct threat to the United States and the American people. A comparison of selected facets of the United States involvement in Afghanistan today and Vietnam in the 1960's reveals the importance of foreign policy and the effects poor decisions can have on the American economy and the security of the United States.

United States foreign policy directly contributed to Al Qaeda's rise to power as a terrorist organization. Al Qaeda's beginning can be traced back to the Soviet-Afghan War which was fought from December 1979 to February 1989. Viewed as a holy war, "non-Afghan" Muslims from Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Southeast Asia joined the *Mujahideen* in Afghanistan to defeat the Soviet Union and end the Soviet occupation.³ During that nine year war the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan backed the Muslim fighters with equipment and funding. After the Soviet withdrawal, most "non-Afghan" Muslim fighters returned to their homes, but in many cases were perceived as

political threats in their own countries.⁴ Under scrutiny, many continued to follow Osama bin Laden and eventually received sanctuary from the Taliban in Afghanistan. These fighters, led by Osama bin Laden, united to form the original members of Al Qaeda and trained thousands of new recruits in training camps located within Afghanistan.

Osama bin Laden views the United States as the “Root of all evil- theologically, politically, and morally – and the source of all misfortunes that have befallen the Muslim world”.⁵ In 1992, he directed the first attack by Al Qaeda against United States’ interests at the Goldmohur Hotel in Aden, Yemen, killing three and wounding five others.⁶ From 1993 to 2001, Al Qaeda conducted five additional terrorist attacks against the United States that caused American casualties. On February 26, 1993, the World Trade Center was attacked by a car bomb, killing six and wounding over 1,000 Americans.⁷ Three years later, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia on June 26, 1996. That attack killed 19 U.S. Service Members and wounded 372 others from several different countries.⁸ Shortly after the Khobar towers bombing, Osama bin Laden issued a “declaration of war against the Americans...”⁹ On February 23, 1998, bin Laden issued a second declaration of war and called for all Muslims to kill Americans and their allies whenever possible.¹⁰ Just six months later, simultaneous truck bombs exploded at U.S. Embassies in major East African cities, killing hundreds, including two Americans.¹¹ As a result, the U.S. State Department declared Al Qaeda a "foreign terrorist organization" in October 1999.¹² One year later the naval warship USS Cole was attacked by a suicide bomber on October

12, 2000, while docked at a port in Yemen. The attack killed 17 and wounded another 39 U.S. Sailors.¹³

President Clinton responded to these terrorist attacks with Presidential Directives 39 and 62, which focused on reducing United States vulnerabilities, deterring terrorism, increasing counter-terrorism capabilities, and responding to terrorist attacks.¹⁴ The Clinton Administration subsequently spent 6.6 billion dollars on these initiatives¹⁵, but efforts to kill Osama bin Laden after the terrorist attacks in East Africa were unsuccessful. In 1998, President Clinton authorized missile strikes targeting Osama bin Laden at a known Al Qaeda training camp location in Afghanistan. The attack killed five Al Qaeda members; however none were leaders of the organization. In response, Osama bin Laden sent a message to President Clinton stating, “He would avenge this attack in a spectacular way and would deal a blow to America that would shake it to its very foundations, a blow it had never experienced before.”¹⁶ This “blow to America” occurred on September 11, 2001, when 19 Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial jetliners and killed nearly 3,000 Americans in New York, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

On September 20th, 2001, President George W. Bush addressed Congress with the famous “War on Terror” speech that rallied the American people and ultimately lead to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In his speech, President Bush stated that “our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”¹⁷ President Bush demanded that the Taliban turn over Osama bin Laden and the other leadership of Al Qaeda being protected within the borders of Afghanistan. The Taliban refused to

cooperate and on October 7, 2001, the United States and an international coalition including Great Britain, Germany, France, Canada, and Australia began Operation Enduring Freedom with air strikes against Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in the country of Afghanistan. This campaign was successful in removing the Taliban from political power in Afghanistan but failed to kill or capture its leadership or that of Al Qaeda.

A second campaign began on March 20, 2003, in Iraq. A multinational force, led by the United States, initiated Operation Iraqi Freedom to rid Iraq of Saddam Hussein and the believed capability to create and launch weapons of mass destruction against coalition and regional allies. Initially, military operations achieved great success by quickly defeating the Iraqi Republican Guard, but in both Iraq and Afghanistan the United States was ill prepared for governance operations, or the insurgency fights that followed the initial victories in both countries. In January 2009, as the U.S. military remained engaged in counter-insurgency fights in two countries, Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th President of the United States.

On December 1, 2009, President Obama delivered a speech to the American public from the United States Military Academy at West Point that addressed policy for the war in Afghanistan. President Obama stated “the security and safety of the American people are at stake in Afghanistan” and “if [he] did not think the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, [he] would gladly order every one of our troops home tomorrow”.¹⁸

The overarching goal of President Obama’s policy is to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and prevent its capability to threaten America and its allies in the future.”¹⁹ To meet this goal, President Obama

emphasizes four objectives for Afghanistan: to deny Al Qaeda a safe haven, reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the [Afghanistan] government, and strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future.²⁰

To accomplish these objectives, the President outlined three approaches (he referred to them as 'ways') to be followed: a military strategy to break the Taliban's momentum and increase Afghanistan's capacity over the next 18 months, a civilian strategy so the Afghan government can take advantage of improved security, and a partnership with Pakistan²¹ to deny Al Qaeda safe haven in the border region of Pakistan.

In the 2010 National Security Strategy, President Obama declared that, the "War on Terror" is over. Instead, the President stated, "We will always seek to delegitimize the use of terrorism and to isolate those who carry it out. Yet, this is not a global war against a tactic – terrorism – or a religion – Islam. We are at war with a specific network, Al Qaeda, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners."²²

Before assessing the Obama Administration's policy, goals and objectives, it's important to review President Obama's statement that "the security and safety of the American people are at stake in Afghanistan" and "if [he] did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, [he] would gladly order every one of our troops home tomorrow."²³ Is it reasonable to perceive the safety of the American people is truly at stake in Afghanistan today? During the battle to remove the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, the majority

of Al Qaeda and their leadership left Afghanistan and re-established operations within the borders of Pakistan. As of October 2009, the number of Al Qaeda estimated to be in Afghanistan was less than 100, with no overt bases remaining in the country.²⁴ Al Qaeda's former third in charge and leader in Afghanistan, Mustafa Abu Al Yazid, released a message stating that Al Qaeda members in that country were short of food, weapons, and other supplies."²⁵ A short time later, on May 22, 2010, Mustafa Abu Al Yazid was reported to have been killed by a drone strike in the border region of Pakistan. These reports support a position that Al Qaeda in Afghanistan is no longer capable of posing a threat to the security of the United States or the safety of the American people. Yet, instead of "bringing our forces home tomorrow," the President has tied down additional United States forces with a surge into Afghanistan that has diminished our capability to combat violent extremism on a global scale.

The goal of President Obama's policy is to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and prevent its capability to threaten America and its allies in the future." Army doctrine defines the term "disrupt" as a tactical task or obstacle effect that integrates fire planning and obstacle effort to break apart an enemy's formation and tempo, interrupt the enemy's timetable, or cause premature commitment of enemy forces, or the piecemealing of his attack.²⁶ The term "dismantle" is not defined in Army doctrine, but is by Webster's Dictionary as "to destroy the integrity or functioning of." Army doctrine defines "defeat" as physically rendering an enemy force combat-ineffective until it is reconstituted. Is it required or even possible to do all three (disrupt, dismantle, and defeat) to protect America and the citizens of the United States? In *Rhetoric and Reality: Countering Terrorism in the Age of Obama*, Dr.

David Lynch states “Even the most effective counterterrorism strategy cannot prevent every attack, and perfect security will never be achieved.”²⁷ Despite Al Qaeda having no capability in Afghanistan today, the United States is not significantly closer to dismantling or defeating Al Qaeda on a global scale than it was at the start of the war nine years ago.

Osama bin Laden still remains extremely popular to a large majority of the Muslim population, especially on the Arabian Peninsula in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.²⁸ His popularity and constant evolution in recruitment, tactics and training has allowed Al Qaeda to remain a global threat despite constant pressure by the United States and Al Qaeda’s lack of capability in Afghanistan today. Through the use of the cyberspace, bin Laden has transformed Al Qaeda into an organization for which physical and geographical boundaries are no longer limiting factors. Al Qaeda’s beliefs, training manuals, and strategy are all available on the internet and can be readily accessed by independent Al Qaeda branches, affiliates and home-grown terrorists.

As we remain engaged in a counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda affiliates out of Yemen narrowly failed in an attempt to mail computer printers in aircraft whose ink contained explosive material designed to explode in mid-air. Within the borders of the United States, home-grown cells and self-radicalization also pose a real threat to the American population. On November 5, 2009, Major Nidal Hasan allegedly opened fire on United States Soldiers and American civilians in a medical facility at Fort Hood, Texas. A total of 12 Americans were killed and another 31 were injured in the attack. President Obama believes “our best defenses against this threat [home-grown terrorists who become radicalized] are well informed and equipped families, local

communities, and institutions.”²⁹ The former Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair, is quoted as saying “the standard of success in countering violent extremism has to be incredibly high...I cannot promise you that the Intelligence Community will be able to discover and stop every attack by a violent extremist group like Al Qaeda. But as a country, we cannot allow a successful attack damage our resolve or to diminish or way of life.”³⁰ His statement and these examples are evidence that Al Qaeda affiliates have not been “dismantled” or “defeated,” and the Al Qaeda threat is not contained to a specific region as a result of geographical dispersion and limited need for state sponsorship with global internet access.

As already noted, President Obama has focused on four objectives for Afghanistan: to deny Al Qaeda a safe haven, reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the [Afghanistan] government, and strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan’s security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan’s future.³¹ Of these four objectives, only one is focused directly at Al Qaeda, the other three are focused on Afghanistan and the Taliban insurgency fight. There is no guarantee that Al Qaeda will return to Afghanistan if the Taliban regain power. Assessments indicate that the Taliban are cutting ties with Al Qaeda because affiliation with this terrorist organization caused the fall of their regime and has reduced Taliban popularity with the Afghan population.³² For lasting peace and stability in the region, there must be reconciliation between the Karzai Government and the Taliban. Initial negotiations have begun between President Karzai and senior Taliban leaders. From a United States perspective, “the Taliban must first renounce violence, cut ties with Al Qaeda and accept the Afghan constitution with its protection of

human rights and women's equality before negotiations can be successful. The Taliban leadership finds these conditions unacceptable and insists that any Afghan government be based on Islamic law."³³ Negotiations will be difficult, but for the country to establish a recognized and legitimate government there must be reconciliation between the Karzai government and the Taliban. Failure to reconcile with the Taliban will likely result in another civil war, just as when Soviet forces pulled out of Afghanistan in the late 1980s.

The "military strategy" being executed in Afghanistan is a counter-insurgency fight "to break the Taliban's momentum". Army doctrine defines an insurgency as an organized, protracted political-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control.³⁴ Counter-insurgency operations are a protracted and expensive commitment, requiring large number of security forces and the existence or creation of a stable government to be successful. In Afghanistan, the Taliban insurgency is focused at weakening the legitimacy of the Karzai government and discouraging popularity of the United States and Coalition counter-insurgency forces with the Afghan people. Security of the people and political legitimacy are key elements of a counter-insurgency campaign. Despite limited successes under the command of General Petraeus, this counter-insurgency strategy has been implemented too late in the war to affect the outcome in the timeframe allotted by the administration. The author of *The Way Out of Afghanistan*, Ahmed Rashid, believes "the key question for General Petraeus is not how many Taliban he kills, but whether the bare bones of an

Afghan state – army, police, bureaucracy – which have been neglected so badly in the past nine years can be set up by 2014.”³⁵

As the United States and Coalition fight the insurgency, a major effort is underway to build the capacity of the Afghan Police and Army. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates informed the President that “the Afghan National Army and National Police would be the key – increasing their numbers, their training, professionalism and commitment...that’s our ticket out.”³⁶ In the last year, the United States has spent \$11 billion training and equipping the Afghan security forces, which currently number 134,000 in the Afghan Army and 109,100 individuals in the police force.³⁷ Yet there are many challenges ahead. The attrition rate in the Afghan Army is 24 percent per year, and the illiteracy rate among the Soldiers is 86 percent.³⁸ The Afghan police situation is even worse, plagued by incompetence, illiteracy, and corruption.

The “civilian strategy” line of effort to assist the fledgling Afghan government is also encountering many challenges in Afghanistan. There are nearly 1,000 United States civilians in Afghanistan representing 10 different United States agencies, including the Department of State, Defense, Agriculture, Justice, Treasury, Homeland Security, as well as the CIA, FBI, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.³⁹ The civilian build-up happened so fast that it exceeded the capacity of the Kabul infrastructure. Basic accommodations and necessities such as housing, food, potable water, security and transportation are in short supply, and have hampered progress along with lack of organization and qualified personnel.⁴⁰

Despite being unpopular with the Afghanistan government and therefore causing tension between General Petraus and President Karzai, the third line of effort – the

counter-terrorism partnership with Pakistan utilizing unmanned drone aircraft against Al Qaeda and Taliban targets in the border region - has been extremely effective. Al Qaeda Leadership has been degraded in their capacity to synchronize and conduct large scale operations. Dennis Blair assessed that Al Qaeda “is less capable and effective than it was a year ago”.⁴¹ He attributes this to the significant leadership losses Al Qaeda has suffered as a result of drone strikes into Pakistan. As of November 16, 2010, the number of foot soldiers killed by drone strike this year is estimated at a low of 449 and a high of 771, and important Al Qaeda leaders killed in 2010 is believed to be ten.⁴²

Clearly, building an effective Afghan military, security force and strong centralized government free of corruption, while fighting an insurgency, could take decades to accomplish and at a cost of \$3.6 billion dollars per month⁴³ there is no guarantee this strategy will work or that the Afghan government will be ready to take control of security operations by 2014. This raises parallels to the situation in Vietnam, more than 40 years ago.

Like the current Afghanistan government, the South Vietnamese government was also plagued with ineffectiveness, corruption and a government too weak to survive without outside assistance.⁴⁴ As in Vietnam, our adversaries in Afghanistan have been resistant to foreign occupiers for generations, successfully utilizing guerilla tactics and freedom of movement with support from the population and neighboring sanctuaries. In Vietnam, the United States continued a war from France who could not defeat the Viet Minh insurgency or the fledgling North Vietnamese Army with conventional forces. Today, the United States is fighting a war in Afghanistan, similar to one previously

fought by the Soviet Union (which ended with their defeat and helped end their reign as a superpower).

President Obama inherited the foreign policy decisions of the Clinton and Bush Administrations on terrorism; similarly, four Presidents shaped the United States involvement in Vietnam that could be considered the greatest foreign policy failure in United States history. The Vietnam experience demonstrates the “kind of tragedy that can result when presidents...enforce their foreign and military policies without informed support of Congress or the American people.”⁴⁵

The French Indochina conflict began during the Truman Presidency. Initially, the United States maintained “neutrality” in this Vietnamese anti-colonial war⁴⁶, but support for the French increased dramatically under the Truman Administration’s containment policy, which viewed Vietnam as key to keeping Southeast Asia out of communist hands.⁴⁷ As early as 1950, the United States supported the French with aid, equipment and military advisors. Likewise, the Viet Minh insurgency was heavily supported by Soviet and Chinese assistance.

In 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower was sworn in as the 34th President of the United States. President Eisenhower significantly increased equipment, funding, and advisors to the region in an effort to prevent a communist victory over the French Colonial government in Indochina. In 1954, as the French were close to defeat at Dien Bien Phu, President Eisenhower “laid the foundation for possible direct United States intervention”⁴⁸ in Indochina. He emphasized to the American public a “domino theory” to clarify the need for United States involvement in Southeast Asia. “...He [President Eisenhower] warned, should Indochina fall [to communism], the rest of Southeast Asia

would 'go over very quickly,' like a "row of dominos"...⁴⁹ Despite United States support efforts, the French were decisively defeated at Dien Bien Phu, which brought an end to the First Indochina War.⁵⁰ During the Geneva Peace Accords, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam received their independence and Vietnam was divided between the "free" South and the Communist North. As a result, the Eisenhower Administration adopted a change of policy with regard to Vietnam. The administration began a plan to defend the remaining portion of South Vietnam and Southeast Asia⁵¹ against any further spread of communism.

The following Kennedy Administration further expanded the role and commitment of the United States in Vietnam with additional aide and advisors. The number of American advisors in Vietnam jumped from 3,205 in 1961 to more than 9,000 by the end of 1962.⁵² These additional forces were not only advising but also becoming engaged in a variety of combat operations to counter a growing insurgency in the South.

Following the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson confirmed United States continued support to South Vietnam in policy, by drafting National Security Council Action Memorandum 273 that declared the central objective of the United States to be to assist the people and Government of South Vietnam to win their contest against the externally directed and supported communist conspiracy.⁵³ Initially, President Johnson provided additional aide and advisors to South Vietnam, just as the Kennedy Administration had done. By 1964, there were more than 23,300 military advisors on the ground and economic assistance was increased by \$50 million.⁵⁴ Despite the commitment of these additional resources, the conditions in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. An even more fragile government resulted from several coups

and resignations, and civil unrest in the population (specifically between the Buddhists and Catholics) grew. As importantly, perceived attacks on U.S. military advisory forces in the South and naval forces in the Gulf of Tonkin incident led to an intense bombing campaign against the North and the commitment of conventional U.S. ground combat forces in Vietnam. In July, 1965, the President made an open-ended commitment to employ American military forces as the situation demanded.⁵⁵

In 1969, as Richard M. Nixon was inaugurated as the 37th President of the United States, the United States had been decisively engaged in combat for more than four years and now had 543,000⁵⁶ troops deployed in Vietnam. President Nixon perceived his ability to end the Vietnam War would decisively affect his political future and place in history.⁵⁷

Today, President Obama finds himself in a similar situation as his strategy in Afghanistan and the United States economy will largely define the success or failure of his Administration. In Bob Woodward's book, *Obama's Wars*, President Obama is quoted as saying, "I think I have two years with the public on this [war in Afghanistan]. They'll stand by us for two years. That's my window."⁵⁸ President Nixon announced troop withdrawals from Vietnam to appease the American public; similarly President Obama has committed to begin the withdrawal from Afghanistan in July 2011. The announcement of troop withdrawals in Vietnam led to a change in strategy by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army. In 1969, North Vietnam limited offensive operations and shifted to a defensive, protracted war strategy. Hanoi was convinced that American public opinion would force President Nixon to withdrawal the remaining U.S. forces.⁵⁹ Mao Zedong extensive writings on insurgency warfare emphasized that

patience and a prolonged insurgency would eventually lead to an insurgent victory.⁶⁰ In a similar manner to the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army in Vietnam, and the *Mujahideen* earlier in Afghanistan, the Taliban are applying a protracted campaign focused at waiting the United States out of Afghanistan.

The Taliban's military campaign meshes well into "Al Qaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020," which is a "long term campaign of *jihad* to rid the *umma* of all forms oppression," and being executed in five distinct stages.⁶¹ In the first stage, Al Qaeda allegedly planned to provoke the United States into invading Muslim lands. The attacks on the September 11, 2001, accomplished this stage with the U.S. military remaining engaged in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The second stage of this strategy is to reawaken the *umma* itself. Al Qaeda believes that large numbers of U.S. forces occupying Muslim soil will enrage the *umma* and generate widespread hatred of America, resulting in *jihad* against the American invaders. The third stage is to expand the conflict and engage the United States in a long war of attrition. This stage is also in progress with the protracted war in Afghanistan and an expanding military role in Pakistan and more recently Libya. The fourth stage is to exploit a global network. Al Qaeda has evolved into a decentralized organization that posts its guiding principles and training manuals on the internet. Branches and affiliates have full autonomy to carry out terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies. The final stage is to stretch the United States by "fighting wars on many fronts as it attempts to secure all the oilfields in the Gulf area and maintain the security of Israel."⁶² The objective of this stage is to bankrupt the United States just as the *Mujahideen* in Afghanistan assisted the United States and Western Europe in bankrupting the Soviet Union. This stage ends with the United

States defeated, the overthrow of hated Arab regimes, and a final victory over the 'nonbelievers' to secure global dominance of the Caliphate.⁶³

Once again, there is a parallel to the Vietnam-era conflict. The cost of Vietnam, estimated at \$167 billion, "triggered an inflation that helped undermine, at least temporarily, America's position in the world economy,"⁶⁴ yet failed to keep the South Vietnamese Government from falling to communism. By surging United States forces, the Obama Administration is leading us further down the same road taken by President Nixon. President Nixon prolonged the Vietnam War an additional four years in an attempt to uphold America's position and credibility in the world and bring a "peace with honor" to Vietnam. Unfortunately, President Nixon's policy decision to prolong the war failed to achieve success in Vietnam and an additional 20, 553 American Soldiers were killed in the last four years of the war.⁶⁵

In hindsight, the argument can be made that the Clinton Administration didn't do enough to stop the emerging threat from Al Qaeda in the 1990s, while the Bush Administration reacted with raw emotion to the attacks on September 11, 2001 and involved the United States in Afghanistan because the honor of our nation was at stake. Al Qaeda attacked the United States on American soil and they were going to pay at all costs. The Obama administration should now be reflecting whether the astronomical cost of continuing such a policy worth the effects achieved?

In a speech on October 29, 2004, Osama bin Laden told the American people "that Al Qaeda spent \$500,000 on the event [September 11, 2001] while America lost, in the event and its subsequent effects more than \$500 billion dollars [as of 2004]...each of Al Qaeda's dollars defeated one million American dollars, thanks to Allah's grace."⁶⁶

In total, Al Qaeda terrorist attacks killed 3,044 Americans since 1992. As of November 15, 2010, the U.S. military has suffered over 5,803 casualties and another 41,228 wounded during combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001,⁶⁷ and the U.S. government has amassed a staggering national deficit exceeding 14.1 trillion dollars. Osama bin Laden said, “We bled Russia until it went bankrupt and withdrew in defeat...we are continuing this policy in bleeding American into bankruptcy [in Afghanistan].”⁶⁸

The expense of further continuing this policy in Afghanistan will dramatically affect the economic recovery and the American population. As the United States remains in the worst recession since the 1929 Great Depression, the Defense budget has increased by \$422 billion or 145 percent since U.S. forces were committed in Afghanistan,⁶⁹ bringing the total Defense budget for 2011 to \$739 billion.⁷⁰ The United States economy also remains extremely fragile with a declining market, industry and banking bailouts, high unemployment, falling home prices, and an increase in home foreclosures. The cost of financing a long war and the overall federal deficit will be significant. Proposals being considered include “...almost \$1 trillion in higher taxes over the next decade (including a higher gas tax), and twice that amount in spending cuts; deep reductions in Medicare payments to doctors, less generous Medigap coverage and new limits on medical malpractice awards; reduced subsidies for farmers, college students, rural phone lines and electricity; a higher retirement age and less generous Social Security benefits for roughly half of all retirees; and billions of dollars carved from military and federal employee pensions.”⁷¹ In the Department of Defense, options affecting individual citizens include reducing 250,000 contractor positions, a three year

freeze on the Department of Defense civilian pay, and a proposal to decrease entitlements and freeze pay for United States military forces.⁷² Whether undertaken in whole or in part, such actions will impact individual citizens' quality of life and entitlements for generations, and reduce strategic options for this and future Presidents.

In Paul Kennedy's book, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, Kennedy suggests that great empires fall for three main reasons: high costs for maintaining internal security, an expanding military presence in the world, and powerful foreign competition in trade and commerce.⁷³ This seems an apt description of the United States' situation today. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with the mission to prevent terrorist attacks, reduce vulnerabilities, minimize the damage, and assist in the recovery of a terrorist attack within the United States. The 2011 budget for homeland security is \$74.6 billion, with the largest allocation of \$36.6 billion going directly to DHS.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Defense spending will exceed \$739 billion dollars this year as we remain engaged in a nine year war that has expanded into Pakistan and more recently Libya. During his West Point speech, President Obama told the American people that "the struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan...." Kennedy's third reason is also being met as China and India pose significant economic threats to the United States in the next decade.⁷⁵

How can the United States extract itself from this situation? The author of *The Way Out of Afghanistan*, Ahmed Rashid, believes "victory on the battlefield is not possible [in Afghanistan] but peace cannot be achieved without United States participation in negotiations." Yet in Vietnam, building capacity and United States

involvement in negotiations did not succeed. During Vietnam, the Nixon Administration was convinced that an honorable peace could be negotiated when backed by a substantial increase in South Vietnamese military capability and relentless military pressure against North Vietnam. "Termed 'Vietnamization', the United States trained and increased South Vietnamese troop strengths to exceed one million, while equipping them with the latest weapons, including one million M-16 rifles, 12,000 M-60 machine guns, 40,000 M-79 grenade launchers, and 2,000 heavy mortars and howitzers. The [South] Vietnamese were also given ships, planes, helicopters, and ...[an enormous amount of] vehicles."⁷⁶

In 1973, as a peace settlement was negotiated and U.S. forces withdrew from Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Army had become one of the largest and best equipped Armies in the world.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, despite the enormous American investment in blood and treasure, the United States failed to contain Communism in North Vietnam. "The Americans could provide money and weapons, but they could not furnish the ingredients necessary for political stability and military success."⁷⁸ Instead, in 1975 the Vietnam conflict ended abruptly, as the North Vietnamese Army captured Saigon via conventional military operations just fifty-five days after beginning what would prove to be their final offensive.⁷⁹ President Truman's "containment" strategy failed, but President Eisenhower's "domino theory" that justified United States intervention in the Vietnam War never happened. In fact, the non-Communist nations in Southeast Asia prospered and attained an unprecedented level of stability in the years following the Vietnam War.⁸⁰

Today, President Barack Obama faces many of the same challenges with respect to Afghanistan as President Richard Nixon faced during his first term with Vietnam. After only limited success in fighting a counter-insurgency campaign while building the capacity of the Afghan Government, Police and Army, and faced with a staggering national deficit that will affect Americans for generations, it is time to significantly reduce or end direct United States involvement in Afghanistan through negotiations. Of course successful peace negotiation with the Taliban will require the involvement of more than just the United States. For true peace to exist in the region, the negotiating parties should include Pakistan, Iran, and the United Nations to negotiate directly with the Taliban.⁸¹ A negotiated peace with the Taliban will help stabilize Afghanistan and may prevent the outbreak of a deeper civil war as Kabul takes over the security role from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). During the Lisbon Summit, NATO announced that it would hand over security to Afghan forces and end the NATO's combat role by 2014, but is committed to stay in a supporting role after that date. Unlike Vietnam, with a negotiated peace in Afghanistan, a NATO force could maintain a presence to ensure a lasting peace in the region. Reducing the United States footprint in Afghanistan will also defuse tensions with the Muslim population by minimizing the perception that the United States is an occupying force, while the Obama administration seeks to rebuild relations and reduce the hatred of America by the Muslim mainstream populations.⁸²

Reducing the U.S. forces deployed overseas will also have a positive impact on public opinion and the struggling United States economy. The White House estimates \$1 million a year per service member to fight the war in Afghanistan.⁸³ A successful

negotiated peace in Afghanistan with regional partners would allow the United States to withdraw as many as 68,000 Soldiers; a saving of \$68 billion dollars a year. In a January 2010 update, the Congressional Budget Office projected that additional war costs could be reduced to \$274 billion if troop levels fell to 30,000 by early 2013.⁸⁴

In his book *Obama's Wars*, President Obama was quoted by Bob Woodward as saying, "We can absorb a terrorist attack. We'll do everything we can to prevent it, but even a 9/11, even the biggest attack ever, that ever took place on our soil, we absorbed it and we are stronger..."⁸⁵ The revised Obama Administration policy to "do everything we can to prevent...[another terrorist attack]" on a global scale is to "disrupt Al Qaeda safe havens worldwide and reduce the threat of terrorist attacks on America and its allies in the future."

Thus, under a different name, the Obama Administration continues the same expensive strategy in Afghanistan as the Bush Administration undertook in the last two years of his presidency. But whether our involvement is called the "War on Terror" or an effort to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan," the fact is that a larger military victory in Afghanistan is not required to safeguard America or the people of the United States. As the current Administration distances itself from the decision to reduce troop levels and the Secretary of Defense says we are in Afghanistan for the long haul, the United States is no closer to dismantling or defeating Al Qaeda on a global scale than it was at the start of the war nine years ago. The United States instead should be focused on building strong regional partners and utilizing its robust military intelligence collection and counterterrorism strike capabilities focused on the disorderly regions, failed states, and

diffuse enemies of the world. The use of covert human sources, drones with high resolution video camera and missiles, and Counter-Terrorism Pursuit Teams has proven to be an effective counterterrorism strategy against dispersed Al Qaeda targets.⁸⁶

The internal and external political-military situation in Afghanistan remains problematic, but a successful negotiated peace with the Taliban endorsed by NATO and regional neighbors could allow the United States to depart Afghanistan with honor, and thereby focus on persistent conflict on a global scale rather than just one geographical region. The 2010 Failed States Index identifies the top 60 failed and failing states in the world with the top five countries on the list are from the continent of Africa, while Afghanistan follows in sixth and Pakistan in the tenth position.⁸⁷ President Obama himself stated, “The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan. It will be an enduring test of our free society, and our leadership in the world. And like the great power conflicts and clear lines of division that defined the 20th century, our effort will involve disorderly regions, failed states, and diffuse enemies.”⁸⁸ In this situation, an adjustment in policy and military strategy focusing on a negotiated settlement with the Taliban is the ticket out of Afghanistan with “honor.” Such a settlement, will allow the United States to increase its focus on “disrupting Al Qaeda safe havens worldwide and reduce the threat of terrorist attacks on America and its allies”, without mortgaging the economic future of the United States any further.

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